7 Things Pharma Should Know About Facebook Timeline

On Feb. 29, Facebook announced its Timeline functionality for Facebook pages at its first-ever event exclusively for marketers, fMC. Facebook Timeline changes the default look and feel of the traditional page from a list of the most recent updates to a complete summary of the brand's entire history. It includes photos, videos, status updates and applications. The new Facebook profile is divided into two main columns, with a line down the middle representing the passage of time.

Companies like Starbucks, Ford and Coca-Cola were early implementers of the new layout, but all other pages have until March 30 to transition to Timeline. The transition is not optional.

As we know, U.S. pharmaceutical companies must be mindful of any changes to how their promotional materials display to the public. If not handled properly, implications can be much more significant than losing a "like."

Fortunately, Timeline also presents opportunities for pharma. Facebook, like every social media platform, will continue to change, but the core of marketing via social media will not: engaging stakeholders and building relationships with them. If you make this the focus of your social media efforts, your strategy will remain on target regardless of the evolution of platforms like Facebook.

Below is a summary of what we at Intouch Solutions® Inc. believe to be the top seven Facebook changes pharmaceutical companies should be aware of, whether they already have a Facebook page or are considering one. For a complete list of the announcements made at fMC about Facebook Timeline, we have also prepared a Q-and-A document that accompanies this article.

1. Whitelisting Still Intact

   As Intouch Solutions covered in this 2011 blog post, Facebook whitelisting is the practice of disabling specific functionality on Facebook pages. The most notable example has been disabling the ability for viewers to comment on Facebook wall posts, photos and videos. Facebook allows whitelisting under very specific circumstances for certain industries, such as pharma. The company confirmed whitelisting would continue to be an option for pharmaceutical companies as long as the page is branded, including the brand and generic name of the drug as the title of the page. The conversation on the page must also be specific to the drug being promoted to qualify for Facebook whitelisting.

   Conversation is the foundation of relationship building, so we believe it's important to allow commenting (with 24-hour monitoring) and thus not whitelist. However, if because of strict regulatory constraints dialogue must be moderated, tools like PharmaWall can still enable conversation (see Point 6).

2. Important Safety Information Still an Option

   A crucial component of pharma Facebook pages has been the Important Safety Information (ISI) box. If a page is claimed as a health/medical/pharmaceutical page,   it will have the same options as in the past to create an ISI text box. This box will now be displayed in the upper right-hand corner of the Timeline. The first 256 characters are visible before a "See More" link allows the entire block of text to be displayed.
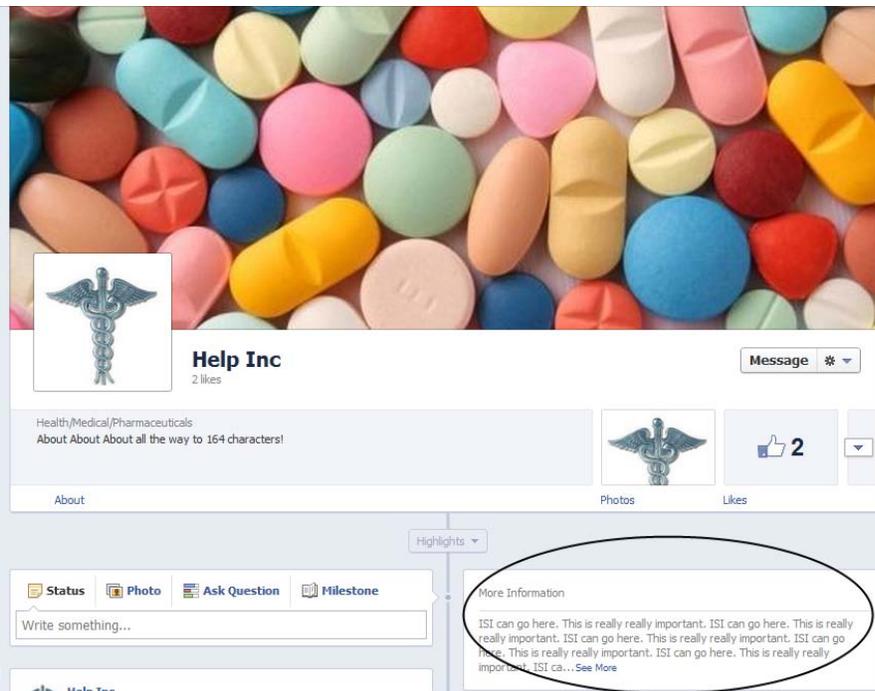
3. Importance of Visual Content

With Facebook Timeline, pages will emphasize visual content more than they ever have before. Videos and photos are not just more aesthetically appealing, they increase engagement, which results in more awareness. One way visual content is more emphasized is through applications aka "apps." What you know as a traditional tab along the left side of the old page becomes an app in Facebook Timeline. Apps display in a horizontal row of rectangular panels underneath the cover photo.


Brands can display four items in this section, but the photos will always appear first. You will be able to include 12 apps total on your page, which users can access from a drop-down menu.

Our recommendation is to utilize just the necessary number of apps to meet your brand objectives and to arrange them in the most appealing order. Next to the cover photo, the apps will be the most visible elements on the page. The app images can be customized (with the exception of the photo app) so consider interesting graphics or engaging visual elements to represent these apps.

4. New Milestones Feature

Every brand has a story of how it came to be. These key moments can now be featured on the right-hand side of your Facebook page. Each milestone correlates to a specific year, and page administrators have the ability to add an image for each milestone, which will be automatically expanded to widescreen and visible to everyone visiting your page. Milestones can date back as far as Jan. 1, 1800.
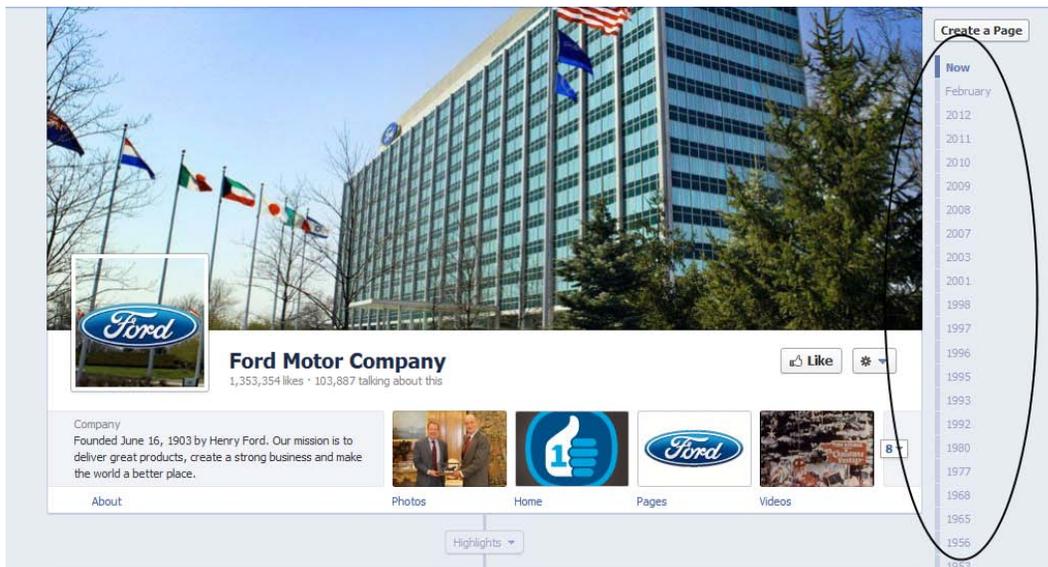
We believe the new milestone functionality is a positive opportunity for pharma companies. The rich histories of pharma companies, their brands, and key dates in the history of the understanding of a disease state will make for interesting milestone content. Key scientific discoveries, a deep heritage of clinical data, or the evolution of a product through extensions can also be communicated effectively via milestones.

5. Pinned Posts

Engagement with a brand page is one of the best features on Facebook. It helps brands build solid, long-term relationships with fans. However, the pre-Timeline Facebook layout meant that fan comments would move down all content posted earlier in time—even messages posted by the brand. "Pinned posts" solve this issue by giving pages the ability to pick what content is featured at the top of the Timeline for seven days. The pinned post must be content posted by the page, not by a fan. A small orange flag appears at the top of a pinned post.

Brands can pin only one item at a time, and the pinned item will automatically be "unpinned" when a new item gets pinned or when the item has been pinned for more than seven days. After being unpinned, the post remains in the chronology of Timeline posts, but there is no visual history that it was pinned in the past.

Pinned posts, in our opinion, offer a unique way for pharma to highlight its most compelling content. Has a post produced a significant number or comments or shares? Pin it to drive more. Or maybe a particularly good piece of content was lost in the shuffle? Revive it with a pin.

6. Impact on PharmaWall

PharmaWall is a product designed by Intouch Solutions to help our clients engage with Facebook users while staying compliant and minimizing risks. As an integrated Facebook application and an alternative to the Facebook wall, this monitoring and moderation system allows visitors to your page to comment on posts. But instead of instantly publishing to Facebook, PharmaWall puts user-generated content into a queue for review by your administrator. The administrator then decides whether to accept, revise or delete the content.

With the new Facebook Timeline, PharmaWall functionality remains intact (see this demo for an example of what PharmaWall looks like in Timeline view). PharmaWall page administrators now have the additional option of choosing a unique image to represent the PharmaWall app, which can be different than the image used as the main profile image.

7. New Advertising Options

Facebook Timeline is all about engagement, and advertising is no exception. Historically, advertisers have been given one placement option: the Marketplace on the right side of a user's profile page. But at fMC, Facebook announced a more advanced option called premium ads. Premium ads help advertisers reach users in locations where they spend the majority of their time, like the newsfeed (home page), user profiles and logout page. They also come with Facebook's assistance with creating the ads, targeting and engaging the desired audience, and managing the campaign. Facebook touts that premium advertising drives two times the ROI and five to 10 times higher engagement. Notably though, premium ads come at a premium price of, at a minimum, $25,000 per month.

For more information on the evolution of Facebook advertising, including new ways for advertisers to share discounts with their customers through "Offers," check out the accompanying in-depth Intouch Solutions POV from a search perspective.

In the evolving world of social media for pharma, this latest Facebook platform change is a "biggie." But it shouldn't alarm pharma marketers. With a little creativity, collaboration with colleagues and sound advice from a trusted advisor, pharma brands can still leverage this powerful platform.

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questions & answers

Facebook Timeline Q&A

FAQ

What happens to the about section? Is there a character maximum?

This has not been officially addressed by Facebook. However, the longest example we could locate was 164 characters. After 164 characters, the text will be truncated.

Can we control which tab a fan lands on by default?

Yes and no. Visitors who arrive at the page organically will always see the Timeline view of the page, but each app will have a unique URL associated with it that can be used to direct visitors to a specific app.

What happens to tabs?

The new Timeline format does not have the left-side panel of links.

In Timeline, the tabs will display in a horizontal row of rectangular panels underneath the cover photo. These are called apps, and there can be a maximum of 12 apps displayed on a page. Four apps will display by default, and photos will always have the most prominent, left-side position in that row of four. You can choose which additional three apps appear here. An additional eight apps can be displayed if the user clicks on a drop-down menu.

Will applications continue to work as they have before?

Yes. Apps will now display in the same horizontal row as described immediately above.

What happens to Pharmawall?

PharmaWall functionality remains intact within the Timeline format. You can see a demo of how PharmaWall looks in Timeline by visiting our demo at www.facebook.com/farmafaux.

Page administrators have the ability to choose a unique image to represent the PharmaWall app, which can differ from the page's main profile image. Intouch Solutions is also working on creating new options for utilizing the increased app screen width.

Will we still have the ability to whitelist?

Facebook whitelisting is the practice of disabling specific functionality on Facebook pages. The most notable example has been disabling the ability for viewers to comment on Facebook wall posts, photos and videos.

Facebook allows whitelisting under very specific circumstances for certain industries, such as pharmaceutical. Whitelisting will continue to be available to pharmaceutical brands.

Can we ensure specific content is above the fold?

Through the new "pinned posts" function, pages will have the ability to pick which content is featured at the top of the Timeline for seven days. The pinned post must be content posted by the page, not by a fan. A small orange flag appears at the top of a pinned post. Brands can pin only one item at a time, and the pinned item then exists in two locations — as the top item on the Timeline itself, as well as within its chronological place. Once unpinned, which happens automatically when a new item gets pinned, or the item has been pinned for more than seven days, the post remains in the chronology of Timeline posts, but there is no visual history that it was pinned in the past.
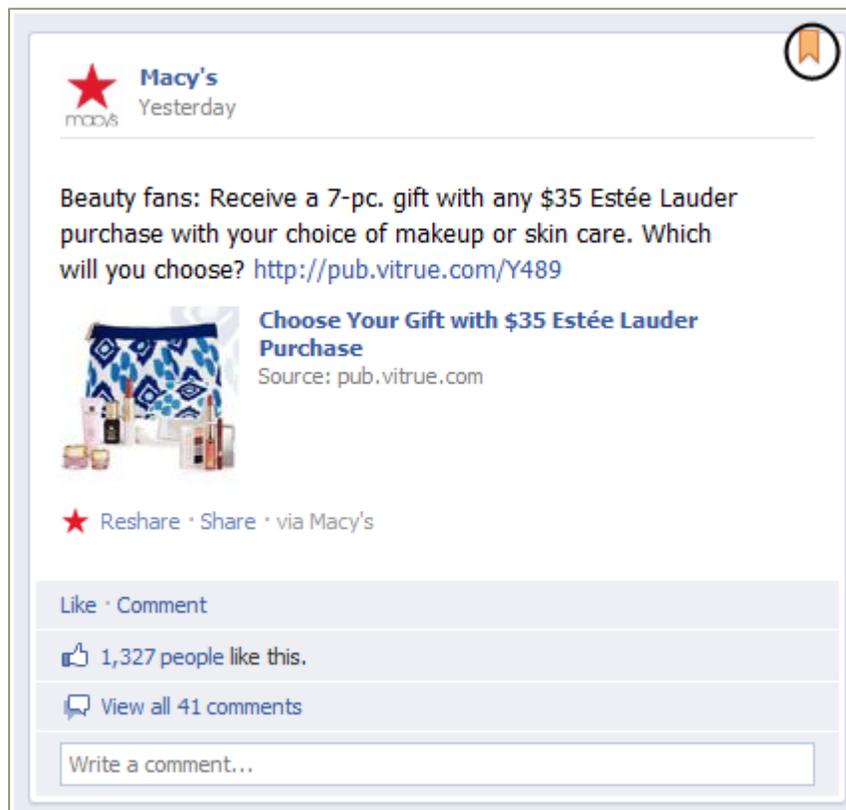
What impact does Timeline have on mobile viewing? Are there any changes to what fans will see when they visit a page from their mobile device?

Facebook is still determining how Timeline will be developed in the mobile space.

Will the frozen Important Safety Information box, which is currently available to pharmaceutical brands, still be available in Timeline?

Yes, a crucial component of Facebook pages has been the Important Safety Information (ISI) box that was always visible on the wall of a Facebook page. If a page is claimed as a health/medical/pharmaceutical page, it will have the same options as in the past to create an ISI text box. This box will now be displayed in the upper right-hand corner of the Timeline. The first 256 characters are visible before a "See More" link allows the entire block of text to be displayed.

What are the development specs for the cover photo?

The ideal size for your cover photo is 851 x 315 pixels. Per the relevant Facebook guidelines, the cover photo must not contain: promotional messaging, calls to action, contact information, price or purchase information, or references to user interface elements (such as like or share).

What are the development specs for the profile photo?

The profile picture scales from 180 x 180 pixels down to 32 x 32 pixels (not a crop). It is suggested that the logo be placed here.

What are the development specs for app images?

You can adjust the width of the interior app creative to be narrow (520 pixels) or wide (up to 810 pixels). App titles are now 18 characters and three ellipses in length. The new "tab icon," which appears on the Timeline home page, is 111 x 74 pixels and can feature full-color images.

Will pages have the ability to opt out of competitor ads being shown on photos or on the right column of the page?

No, however, competitors cannot choose to display an ad on a specific page. If a competitor's ad appears on a page, it is luck and based on the specific user.

Can ad buys link to any app?

Yes, each app will have a unique URL associated with it that can be used to direct visitors to a specific app, and that URL can be used in your Facebook ad.

Can the cover photo be a hyperlink?

The cover photo is clickable, but it will take the visitor to a larger version of that image.

What does Timeline mean for API?

This has not been addressed.

Is there a grace period to switch?

Facebook doesn't typically force its users to make a huge change overnight. As we saw with the switch from personal profiles to Timelines, we have a grace period that, in this case, lasts until March 30.

Is there any chance pharmaceutical brands will get a longer grace period than March 30?

No.

Will the newsfeed become a Timeline?

No.

What about fan gating?

All indications point toward fan gating no longer being allowed, but Facebook Pages terms & conditions states as of March 1, 2012, "You are required to restrict access to Pages (through our gating functionality) as necessary to comply with applicable laws and Facebook policies, including our Advertising Guidelines and Community Standards."

Will Timeline still provide the option of geo-targeting posts?

Yes, this functionality will still be available.

Opportunities

Ability to add past events

Timeline now has the ability to add a "milestone," which is a key moment for the brand. Milestones are automatically expanded to widescreen and are visible to everyone visiting your page. Each Milestone can have a corresponding photo, and each photo displays at 843 x 403 pixels. At this time, Jan. 1, 1800, is the earliest date a milestone can have.

Tab order on the personal bar

Apps will now display in a horizontal row of rectangular panels underneath the cover photo. There can be a maximum of 12 apps displayed on a page, and four apps will display by default. Photos will always have the most prominent, left-side position in that row of four, but page administrators will have the ability to choose which additional three apps appear there.

Ad spend options

Facebook Timeline is all about engagement, and advertising is no exception. Historically, advertisers have been given one placement option: the Marketplace on the right side of a user's profile page. But at fMC, Facebook's first-ever event exclusively for marketers, it announced a more advanced option called premium ads. Premium ads help advertisers engage with users in locations where they spend the majority of their time, like the newsfeed (home page), user profiles and logout page. They also come with Facebook's assistance with creating the ads, targeting and engaging the desired audience, and managing the campaign. For more information on the evolution of Facebook advertising, including new ways for advertisers to share discounts with their customers through "Offers," check out this in-depth Intouch Solutions POV from a search perspective.

Mobile

Facebook is still determining how Timeline will be developed in the mobile space, but we anticipate there will be opportunity in this space.

Opportunity to have more visual content (videos, photos)

With Facebook Timeline, pages will emphasize visual content more than they ever have before. Videos and photos are not just more aesthetically appealing, they increase engagement, which results in more awareness. One way visual content is more emphasized is through the cover photo and each application's image.

Interact with fans privately

Fans will have the ability to reach out to a page via private messaging, and the page can respond privately. The page *will not* be able to proactively reach out to a fan via private messaging.

Admin levels

Facebook announced that it will soon have five levels of administrator access, each with its own level of permission. That functionality is expected to go live at the end of March. No additional details have been announced.